

# Caring for your child in a hip spica cast

Paediatric Occupational Therapy Service

Information for Parents and Carers

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## What is a hip spica?

A hip spica is a plaster which covers the child's lower limbs. There are two types of these casts:

1. a full hip spica
2. a one and a half hip spica.

The shape of the hip spica varies. (See photo below)

### Full hip spica:

- The cast starts from just under the nipple line.
- It goes down both legs to the ankles.
- The legs may be positioned so the knees are bent and point outwards.
- The legs can be set apart. Sometimes a wooden bar is attached to the cast between both legs to provide support.

The hips can be positioned so that the child is in a semi-reclined position. There is a hole in the plaster around the groin to allow for toileting.

**One and a half hip spica:** this is similar to the above plaster. The only difference is that 1 leg is in plaster to the ankle and the other above the knee.

While the spica cast itself is not a surgical procedure, the spica cast is generally used after surgery or for a broken bone. The aim of a hip spica is to support and protect the joint by stopping it's movement whilst it heals.



**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit [www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk) for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals  
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)

## Moving your child in a hip spica

**Transfers:** Parents of younger children often choose to lift their child once in a spica cast. For older children we recommend they are hoisted for transfers. This is due to the increased weight from the cast. This would also be advised if you feel you cannot lift your child due to back problems, pregnancy, general medical issues or the child may be too heavy to lift. The hospital Occupational Therapy team can organise a hoist for you. If you choose to lift your child we can talk about safe manual handling techniques after surgery. It is your responsibility to tell your Occupational Therapist if you have any back or health problems that will stop you lifting your child in the hip spica cast.

Carers often say that handling their child in a hip spica is like handling a newborn baby, as they feel unsure where to hold the child in plaster. Make sure you are supporting their legs and back whenever you are moving them. Make sure you are not lifting your child up under the arms.

If your child has a wooden bar between their legs, do not use this to lift your child up. It will likely break and may cause your child injury.



When you are on the ward the nurses and Occupational Therapist can show you the right ways of picking up your child. There will be opportunities to practice lifting your child with support from staff. It is important to remember that the plaster increases the weight of your child. It is best to limit the number of times you lift your child by planning your moves.

Moving a bed downstairs would be recommended to limit lifting up and down stairs. If this is not possible and your child has naps during the day, we would advise they stay downstairs for this.

### **It is important to do the following when lifting your child:**

- Do not bend your back. Bend at your knees and keep your back straight
- Keep your child's weight as close to your body as possible

**Mobility:** If your child has a buggy, you will be asked to bring it into the hospital. This is to see if your child can be positioned in this with the hip spica cast. It is essential that your child is fastened securely in their buggy.

The hospital Occupational Therapy team may be able to loan a wheelchair (for older children) or a different buggy if needed. This depends on stock being available.

If a buggy or wheelchair is loaned to your child, the Occupational Therapy Team ask that this is returned as soon as possible once your child's hip spica has been removed. The Occupational Therapist will speak to you further about this if needed.

## Positioning in a hip spica

Children in hip spica casts can be difficult to position, but there are a number of ways to help your child to sit up.

Parents have reported that bean bags are very useful, as they mould around the child, providing support and are good for repositioning. Children can be placed on their tummy to play but they must be supervised at all times in this position. Children must not sleep on their tummy as they are unable to change their position.

There is also the choice of a seat which has been specifically made for children in hip spica casts, called the STEPS hip spica chair. You can buy this from Smirthwaite Ltd. (phone number can be found on the back of this booklet).

As the hip spica cast limits your child's movement, it is very important to move your child regularly during the day and night. This is to reduce the risk of pressure areas. You may need to sleep in the same room as your child whilst they get used to the hip spica cast.

At first your child may only sleep for short periods and may need extra reassurance. Your child must only sleep on their back and never be placed on their tummy to sleep. Children usually find it more comfortable if a pillow is placed under their knees when they are laying on their back as sometimes the knees are plastered in a bent position. This offers more support.

## Activities of daily living

**Toileting:** If your child wears nappies, it is important to make sure that the cast does not become wet or soiled. This will affect the strength of the plaster and cause the plaster to smell. The nursing staff on the ward will show you the best way of putting a nappy on your child.

To put the nappy on: use a small nappy, with the sticky tabs removed. Tuck this nappy between your child's skin and the plaster. A 2nd nappy is then put over this to lessen the chance of leakage.

If your child is toilet trained, they may be able to use a commode. We can lend you one if needed. It is not recommended that your child is sat on a toilet due to the risk of falling. Your child will need a parent/ carer to support them to go to the toilet. You could use an urinal bottle or bed pan. You would need to buy this yourself.

**Dressing:** It can be difficult for a child to wear certain clothes due to the type of cast they are in. Trousers, shorts and pants can be adapted with velcro straps and press studs. Or you can use trousers with elasticated waistbands or older children's clothes. Dresses, long tops and skirts are also a good choice.

**Bathing:** Whilst your child is in plaster they will not be able to have a bath. You will need to give them a strip wash. The hip spica must not get wet. If water is absorbed into the spica the plaster will become weak and crack.



## Going home

Children should not go home in a standard car seat whilst in a hip spica cast. This is because standard car seats are not crash tested for children in the casts.

You can buy or hire a car seat designed specifically for children with hip spica casts from the In Car Safety Centre (Tel: 01908 220 909). Another choice for younger children is available to loan from the STEPS charity.

The law requires all children in a car use the right booster or car seat, up to the age of 12 years old, or a height of 135cm (whichever comes first). It is the driver's responsibility to make sure that the right car seat is used in accordance with the law. This responsibility includes making sure the safe transport of your child whilst in a hip spica cast. The hospital does not have children's car seats or other forms of restraint for use in motor vehicles.

Should you choose to use your current car seat, your child's position in the seat can be reviewed by the Occupational Therapist. We still do not recommend they are safe to use from a crash test safety point of view.

If you do not have a hip spica car seat, it is recommended that you use ambulance transport on discharge home, if available. This can be arranged by the ward but you need to be aware that you could have a long wait.

Advice and information, including legislation about the safe transport of children, is available from RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) [www.rospa.com](http://www.rospa.com)

## School / nursery

You will need to discuss with your child's school or nursery as to whether they are able to accommodate your child's needs whilst they are in the cast. Any equipment provided by your Occupational Therapist for home such as a hoist, cannot be replicated within the school or nursery setting. It is the school or nursery's responsibility to fill out their own risk assessment.

Children who cannot access school within Leicestershire for a prolonged period, may be able to access the hospital school service for a limited time period. This can be discussed on admission, as to whether it will be available to your child.

## Others caring for your child

It is important that any other people caring for your child **such as** babysitters, grandparents, nursery nurses, teachers etc. have the knowledge and ability to care for your child whilst in a hip spica. If you would like them to be present at the time of assessment, please discuss this with your Occupational Therapist.

## Skin and cast advice

### Looking after the cast

- The cast must be kept dry at all times.
- Check the cast at each nappy change for any red areas, rubbing around the cast edges and for cracks and dents.
- Make sure your child does not poke and hide toys in the cast.
- Do not use cream or talcum powder around or inside the cast.
- If the cast is rubbing and causes red areas/irritation, contact the ward as soon as possible.
- Do not get the cast wet. If the cast gets soiled, wipe clean with a damp cloth or baby wipe.
- If you note any weakness in the cast, particularly on the side that had surgery, contact the ward as soon as possible.

### Looking after your child's skin

- Every day, look at the skin to make sure there are no sores or blisters, mainly at the areas around the edges of the cast.
- Check your child's toes. They should be warm and pink and not swollen. They should be able to wriggle them around.
- Piriton/antihistamines can be used for itching. Do not put talcum powder down the cast.
- If there are any visible wounds that are oozing/inflamed or hot to touch, please contact the ward as soon as possible.



## More information

If you need more information you can call the Paediatric Occupational Therapists at the Leicester Royal Infirmary on **0116 258 5714**.

If you would like to talk to someone who knows from personal experience, there is an organisation called STEPS (the national charity for those whose lives are affected by childhood lower leg (limb) conditions). Contact details below.

If you need more information on suitable equipment to buy, a list is provided by STEPS.

## Useful contact numbers

STEPS – [www.steps-charity.org.uk](http://www.steps-charity.org.uk) **01925 75 0271**

In Car Safety Centre (transport information) **01908 220 909**

Smirthwaite Ltd. (hip spica chairs) **01626 835 552**

[www.smirthwaite.co.uk/](http://www.smirthwaite.co.uk/)

RoSPA - [www.rospa.com](http://www.rospa.com) (for car safety) **0121 248 2000**

Please remember that this leaflet is intended for general advice only. We aim to make the information as up to date as possible, but please be warned that it is always subject to change. Always check specific advice or concerns with your doctor or health professional.

We acknowledge the use of information from the following source: STEPS – practical tips for caring for your child in a hip spica.

Photographs: by kind permission from the parents of Albie.

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔  
على هذه المعلومات بلغةٍ أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل  
જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email [equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)



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